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Lead level may be U.S. high

Cleveland to use revised figures against smelter in court

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PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

CLEVELAND

Lead pollution at Master Metals Inc. is six times higher than previously believed and may be the worst recorded in the country, according to government officials.

Cleveland officials believe the new numbers will add ammunition to their court efforts to shut down operations at Master Metals until the problem is resolved.

A trial is scheduled for Tuesday before Judge William Corrigan in Cleveland Housing Court.

Scientists who initially analyzed air samples from the lead-smelting company on W. 3rd St. used the wrong mathematical calculation, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and Cleveland officials said. When the mistake was discovered, the same raw numbers were crunched again.

The recalculated figures reveal that the lead level in the outdoor air at Master Metals steadily climbed from April on. During the second quarter, the level was more than 18 times above that allowed by the U.S. and Ohio EPAs. Air samples taken down the street from Master Metals

had readings at or above the legal limit for the second quarter. The readings usually are based on five samples a month over three months.

It is not known how much of the lead was the product of new emissions and how much was the result of old emissions that fell to the ground and then were kicked back into the air. Monitoring just began in January under orders from the U.S. EPA.

"I am very concerned that this problem is much worse than what we initially thought," Mayor Michael R. White said in a statement, "and lead levels are steadily increasing, which

jeopardizes the health of our citizens who live and work in the Tremont-Flats area."

Company officials could not be reached for comment. Company lawyer John Climaco would not comment on the new numbers.

Last month, Cleveland lost a preliminary round in its attempt to shut down Master Metals. At that time, the court had the lower numbers.

Under state and federal laws, the maximum standard of lead in the air is 1.5 micrograms per cubic meter. During the second quarter, the level at Master Metals was 28.04, and the

levels at two monitors down the road were 1.5 and 1.56.

"We believe these are the highest levels recorded any place in the country," said William Gruber, chief assistant city law director.

Gary Engler, supervisor of the air quality and analysis unit at the Ohio EPA in Columbus, said he was told by researchers at the U.S. EPA that the previous high was about 10 micrograms per cubic meter at a plant in Illinois. In a computer search yesterday, Engler found an Illinois plant that had a level of 11.77 earlier this year.

SEE LEAD/3-B

Lead

FROM/1-B

Lead poisoning can cause kidney, neurological and reproductive damage in adults. Children with excessive exposure are at risk for learning disabilities and neurological and kidney damage.

David Nuber, a toxicologist with the Ohio EPA, said the way lead is dispersed in the air depends on several factors, including weather, but in general people within 6.2 miles of

the emission site could be at risk of greater exposure.

Master Metals has been cited repeatedly for violating environmental and worker-health regulations. It has signed several agreements with the federal and city governments to bring its plant into compliance.

Gruber said that in the last two years the company has "made some effort and cooperated at times" with city efforts to reduce emissions. "In the end, they have not taken the full measure of actions that they must know they have to take," he said.